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THE PRACTICAL
BEGINNING OF THE

BODY OF CHRIST



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The positional beginning of the Body of Christ took place in the mind of God before time began (Eph. 3:9; II Tim. 1:9). The Body of Christ itself remained a secret hidden from man until, in His own time, God initiated the Dispensation of Grace and revealed its message to the Apostle Paul. This was the practical beginning of the Church, which is Christ's Body.

Among those who recognize a unique spiritual administrative order of grace that the Lord revealed through the Apostle Paul, there are two primary views on when this new dispensation began. Some believe that the Dispensation of Grace began with the unprecedented conversion experience of the Apostle Paul in Acts chapter nine, while others think that it began with the separation of Paul unto the distinctive ministry that the Lord had called him to in Acts chapter thirteen. These are generally referred to as the Acts Nine and Acts Thirteen positions. Both of these positions are in accord with the normally accepted statement that "the Body of Christ began with the Apostle Paul before he wrote his first epistle", which is found in the doctrinal statements of most churches and organizations that hold to what is often referred to as a "mid-Acts beginning of the Church".

There are also two other positions. Even though they have fewer adherents than those previously mentioned, they should be noted. One is the Acts Eleven position and the other is the Acts Twenty-eight position. While the Acts Eleven view falls within the parameters of a true mid-Acts position, the Acts Twenty-eight idea is actually a post-Acts position as it claims that the Dispensation of Grace did not begin until after Acts 28:28. We believe that this is an extreme position that is scripturally untenable. We will not take up this issue here except to say that presupposition and a faulty system of hermeneutics underlies the conclusions of the proponents of the Acts 28 position. Many that hold this view seem to mistake what they consider to be special knowledge for spirituality. Often associated with this position are the false doctrines of soul sleep, or soul extinction, between death and resurrection, and sometimes the teaching of either universal reconciliation or the extinction of the unsaved. We will take a closer look at this theory later.

THE Acts 9 POSITION

In order to "*rightly divide the word of Truth*" (II Tim. 2:15), we must be able to determine, at least approximately, when the Dispensation of Grace began so that we can make a determination concerning which part of the Bible directly applies to the present dispensation and its Church, the Body of Christ and which pertains to Israel and God's covenant promises. The position taken here is that God interrupted the prophesied Kingdom program and its promises concerning Israel's national salvation and regathering in the Promised Land when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus as recorded for us in Acts chapter nine (see Acts 9:1-31).

Paul's Unique Conversion

Saul of Tarsus was a self-righteous, hard-hearted, Christ-rejecting Pharisee when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him as he traveled towards Damascus for the express purpose of arresting those who believed that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited Messiah. He had already been involved in the murder of Stephen and with the persecution of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 7:54-58). Now, he had obtained letters from the High Priest giving him the authority to arrest any believers he found in Damascus and take them to Jerusalem to stand trial and possibly be put to death (Acts 22:4-5). As he came near to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ suddenly appeared to him in a bright light and spoke to him (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:12-18).

The manner and timing of the Lord's appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus is of great doctrinal importance as it was outside the parameters of the Kingdom program. According to prophecy, Jesus Christ left the twelve apostles on earth as His official spokesmen, first to Israel and then to the nations (Lk. 24:45-48). Prophetically, He was not scheduled to personally return to earth until He came in power and glory to defeat the forces of anti-Christ and take over the rule of Israel and the world (Ps. 110:1-3; Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-32 ff.). At that time Christ will restore David's throne and Israel's glory. Israel's King was to stay in self-imposed exile in heaven until the appointed time (Acts 3:18-21). Jesus Christ's appearing to Saul the blasphemer on the road to Damascus was an interruption of the prophetic program under which the twelve Kingdom apostles were commissioned. This is where and when God first dispensed grace under a new and unpropheied program. This event marks the beginning of a new dispensation, the Dispensation of the Grace of God.

Israel's Crisis

The leaders of Israel had rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Jesus Christ and stoned Stephen when he confronted them with the fact that just as Israel's leaders of old had persecuted and slain God's prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah, they were guilty of betraying and murdering the Messiah Himself when He did come, and they had utterly failed to keep the Law as well (Acts 7:51-59).

The stoning of Stephen took place about one year after Peter's Pentecostal message (c. AD 31). In that message, he charged Israel's leaders with unjustly putting Jesus Christ to death and called on the people of Israel to "*repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins*" in order to be saved "*from this untoward (crooked) generation*" (see Acts 2:12-40). The meaning was clear. Those of the nation of Israel who did not repent of Israel's national sin of murdering the Messiah would be held personally responsible for the crime. They would be accountable before God for His death just as if they were there that day clamoring for Him to be crucified, agreeing that His blood would be on their shoulders (Matt. 22:25). To follow the leaders of the nation would be to follow them into perdition.

The leaders of Israel had rejected God's Son during His earthly ministry to the nation and rejected the testimony of the Holy Spirit through His apostles after His ascension into heaven. Stephen, who was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5,8,10; 7:55) and transformed before their eyes (Acts 6:15), accused them of not keeping the Law of Moses and of murdering the Christ. They refused to listen (Acts 7:57) proving that, just as he had said, they were also guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). If they had not before, they most certainly had at this time committed the unpardonable sin that the Lord Jesus had warned the nation against (Matt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:28-29; Lk. 12:8-10). By holding their clothes and consenting to his death, Saul of Tarsus joined the council in killing Stephen (Acts 6:12; 7:54,58; 8:1), thus identifying himself with their sin of murdering the Messiah. His conduct following Stephen's death shows that he joined them not just in principle but also in attitude, thought, and deed (Acts 8:3-4; 9:1-2). In his blindness, Paul was following the blind leaders of Israel, and both were headed toward the ditch of perdition (Matt. 15:12-14).

Was there room for repentance? Could Saul have turned to the Lord and been forgiven of his sin? We think yes, that while Saul was under the same condemnation as the leaders of Israel because he had identified himself with them, he still had the opportunity to find forgiveness by confessing Israel's national sin of not keeping the Law of Moses (resisting the Father), murdering the Just One (resisting the Son), and renouncing the miracles and preaching of God's Spirit-filled messengers as untrue (resisting the Holy Spirit) that Stephen had charged her leaders with (Acts 7:51-53; cf. Acts 5:27-33). He had an opportunity when he heard Stephen's message, and no doubt he was familiar with what Peter and the other eleven Apostles were preaching as it was specifically because of their preaching in the name of Jesus Christ that he was persecuting the Church. He was self-deceived, trusting in the Law and his ability to keep it and the fact that he was a Hebrew. He was sure that he had an open door to the Kingdom of God because of his self-righteousness (cf. Phil. 3:4-9).

In reality, he had no hope apart from the message of the Apostles. If he did not respond to it in true repentance, he would be lost along with Israel's hard-hearted national leaders. The door to the Kingdom of God that Israel was looking for was Jesus Christ, whose disciples he sought to destroy. Still he had opportunity because unlike the leaders who knew without a doubt that Jesus was the Christ but, because of pride, would not admit it, Saul was acting in ignorance and unbelief. Israel's leaders could have claimed ignorance before Pentecost, but since then they had been presented with overwhelming evidence that Jesus Christ was alive and was both Lord and Christ. With the stoning of Stephen, they sealed their fate. But Paul, who did not have the kind of first-hand knowledge of Christ's earthly ministry that those leaders did, was following them in ignorance (I Tim. 1:12-13). He could have known, and should have known, but he chose to follow the way of the Pharisees in unbelief.

When Stephen said he saw a vision of the glory of God and Jesus Christ standing at His right hand is when the council members took their fury out on him. They knew full well what this vision meant, that judgment was about to fall on the nation, but refused to admit that it was true. Like those of earlier generations that stoned God's prophets, they vainly thought that if they could do away with the messenger they would somehow escape the judgment that he

proclaimed. Their hatred that led to the crucifixion of Christ was based on the same response of unbelief. In both cases they claimed that they were doing God's will. Saul, in his misplaced zeal for the Law, joined them in persecuting the believers even to the point of taking the lead in the effort to destroy them (Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-6).

It was when the members of the council responded to Stephen's charge against them by "*gnashing at him with their teeth*" that he was given the vision of Jesus "*standing on the right hand of God*" (Acts 7:54-55). It was when he told them what he was seeing that "*they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord*". Refusing to hear the truth, they carried him out and stoned him to death. Israel's persistence in unbelief had brought the world's rebellion against God to a head and His chosen nation was now leading it. On the prophetic clock, it was time to purge Israel and the world of unbelief through the events of the Tribulation period. The time of Jacob's trouble was at hand (Jer. 30:7).

Israel was at a crisis point, and Saul of Tarsus was taking a major leadership role in the nation's rebellion against God by becoming its Field Marshall and spearheading the persecution of His saints. Unrepentant and on his way to Damascus to imprison believers, Saul was not in a position to be saved under the prophesied Kingdom program. But God, who is rich in mercy, sent His Son to apprehend Saul, His foremost enemy, through grace and initiate a new program through which salvation would be offered directly to the Gentiles. He took Saul as a prisoner of war, changed his heart, and sent him out as the Apostle to the Gentiles with a message of grace. Under the Kingdom program, the Gentiles would receive God's blessings through Israel. But now the Gentiles would receive God's blessings **apart from Israel**.

The Dispensing of God's Grace

This brings us to the question; did the Dispensation of Grace begin when Jesus Christ interrupted the prophecy program by leaving heaven to appear to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9 1-9ff.), or later when Paul was formally separated unto the ministry God had called him to by the leaders of the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:2-3), or somewhere in between? To answer this, we must look at the departures from the Kingdom program that took place, Paul's testimony about his commission as an Apostle, and how the transition from the prophesied Kingdom program into the mystery program (Grace) took place.

1. As we have already mentioned, Paul's salvation was not in line with the Kingdom message. We believe that the following list shows that God initiated a new dispensational order at the time of his conversion.

- a. Paul was engaged in active persecution of the Church (Acts 9:1-2). Under prophecy, those leaders of Israel who scattered the flock were under condemnation (Jer. 23:1-3; Ezek. 34:1-10; cf. Matt. 23).

- b. Jesus Christ's appearance to Paul was not in accordance with the prophetic message of the Kingdom, which shows Him waiting in heaven until His return to earth in power and glory, when *"every eye shall see Him"* (Hos. 5:15; Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21; Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:29-30; John 16:7-10; cf. Acts 9:17).
- c. The prophesied appearing of Jesus Christ will mark Israel's turning back to the Lord and the people's return to the Promised Land, while His appearance to Saul initiated God's setting aside of Israel in unbelief (Zech. 12:10-14; cf. Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28).
- d. That Paul was sent specifically to the Gentiles at that time even though Israel was not yet converted (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17). Prophetically, Gentile salvation was to come through believing Israel's rise (Isa. 60:1-4; Zech. 8:20-23). In contrast, the fall of Israel brought salvation to the Gentiles through the mystery of Grace (Rom. 11:11, 15; 16:25-27; Eph. 3:1-6).
- e. That, following Paul's conversion, the persecution of the Church in all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria subsided (Acts 9:31). Under the Kingdom program, persecution of believers, especially in Jerusalem, was to steadily increase until Jesus Christ's return to deliver Israel from her enemies (Matt. 24:3-31; Isa. 59:19-21; Jer. 30:3-9).
- f. That it was necessary to provide relief aid to the saints in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). Believing that it was imminent, the Kingdom believers had sold their property and pooled their resources in order to get through the Tribulation period that will precede Jesus Christ's return to establish His Kingdom on earth. During the Tribulation, believers will not be able to buy or sell on the open market (Rev. 13:16-17). But, by the time the collection had been taken, it had been fifteen years since Peter had first offered the Kingdom to Israel by announcing that the *"the great and notable Day of the Lord"* was at hand (Acts 2:14-21 ff). What happened? The Tribulation did not come because the Lord had interrupted the prophetic Kingdom program when He appeared to Paul. Now, after many years, their resources had been depleted and with a famine coming they were in dire circumstances. If the prophetic timetable had not been delayed, the Tribulation would have already taken place by this time and Jesus Christ would have been ruling the world from Jerusalem.

We believe that the foregoing list of things that took place following Saul of Tarsus' conversion on the road to Damascus provides compelling evidence that there was a major departure from the prophecy program that took place at that time. God dispensed grace instead of bringing on the prophesied Tribulation through which He will one day dispense His wrath on an unbelieving world. This unprophesied dispensing of grace initiated a new Church, the Body of Christ, which over the next several years would grow as the existing Kingdom Church would wither on the vine and finally die out as the Body of Christ displaced it. But, as strong as the evidence is, even more telling are the events recorded in Acts chapter ten.

A Major Dispensational Change

After Paul's conversion, Peter was sent to Caesarea by the Lord to share the gospel with a Roman centurion named Cornelius. This event confirms that a major program change was taking place at that time. The events of Acts chapter ten are generally thought of as simply the opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles and that God did this because Peter still didn't understand that the gospel was to go to all the world without any regard for nationality. This is true, but not for the reason generally assumed. We should note here that what took place was not according to the Kingdom Gospel that Peter and the eleven had been commissioned under. The Apostles knew that the Gospel was to go to all the world, but not in the manner it did because what took place was outside of the realm of prophecy.

Peter and the other apostles had been charged with the responsibility of making disciples of all nations (see Matt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16). The Bible is clear that the Gentiles were included in the Kingdom program (Isa. 49:5-6). It is equally clear that in the Kingdom the Gentiles will be under the spiritual and legal authority of Israel (Isa. 42:5-6; 49:22-23; 60:2-3; 61:5-6; 62:1-2; Zech. 8:20-23). That the Lord told Peter that it was alright to eat unclean animals and to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles was the same as telling him that the Kingdom Commission he was laboring under was being rescinded. During the Millennial Kingdom, the terms of the Mosaic Law, with some modification, will be in effect. This includes the civil statutes and the religious rituals as well as the moral code contained in the Ten Commandments. Included will be circumcision and the prohibition of eating unclean animals.

It is commonly assumed that because the Apostle Paul says that the believer is "*not under the Law, but under Grace*" (Rom. 6:14) that the Law has been completely abolished, but this is not true. It is true that the "*handwriting of ordinances*" contained in the Law have been taken out of our way in the Dispensation of Grace, but it is equally true that they will be in force during the Millennial Kingdom. The major difference between the Dispensation of the Law (from Moses to Christ) and the Dispensation of Righteousness (the Millennial Kingdom era) is that Israel will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and supernaturally enabled to keep the Law in the Kingdom (see Jer. 31:31-323; Ezek. 11:18-20; 36:24-28). During the Kingdom era, the requirements of the Law will be in force. This will include blood and meal offerings (Ezek. 40:39; 43:19-27; 44:29; 45:17; 46:2, 5, 20) and annual feasts (Ezek. 45:21, 25) as well as the keeping of the regular Sabbath (Ezek. 44:24; 45:17; 46:3).

Under the Mosaic administration, the offerings looked forward to the cross. With Jesus Christ having fulfilled the Law and its types, in the Kingdom these offerings will be memorial in nature, looking back to the cross in honor of what took place there. The dietary laws will be enforced as they are part of the laws and statutes given to Israel by God (Ezek. 44:24). Before the Lord sent Peter to Cornelius, He repealed the dietary ban of the Law on eating the meat from certain animals (Acts 10:9-16). This was so difficult for Peter to accept that the Lord had to show him the same vision of the clean and unclean animals three times to make it clear to him that at that time the meat of all animals was to be considered as clean.

That Cornelius and those with him were **uncircumcised** when Peter went and ate with them in Caesarea was another breach in the Kingdom program (Ezek. 44:9). Peter knew full well that under his commission he was not allowed *“to keep company, or come unto one of another nation”* (Acts 10:28a). His acknowledgment that he could no longer *“call any man common or unclean”* (Acts 10:28b) was not intended to imply that he was beginning to better understand the scope of his God-given commission, but instead was a statement to the fact that he recognized that God was doing something new and highly unusual. After receiving the vision of the clean and unclean animals and being instructed to eat of both, Peter wondered to himself about what the vision meant (Acts 10:17a). The answer was given to him almost immediately as the men sent by Cornelius showed up at his door at that very moment (Acts 10:17b) and the Holy Spirit told him to go with them (Acts 10:18-23). There is nothing in the prophetic Kingdom program that places Gentiles on an equal footing with the seed of Abraham. In a very real way, Gentile blessings and acceptance into the Kingdom are based on them turning to the God of Israel and how they treat His chosen people (Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 25:31-36). Prophetically, this is true on both the personal and national levels.

In obedience to a direct command from the Lord that was given through a vision, Peter went to Caesarea and preached the gospel to Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, and those with him (Acts 9:24-43). But a strange thing happened during Peter’s message. The Holy Spirit fell on these Gentiles, astonishing the Jews that had come with Peter (Acts 9:44-45). Peter then had them baptized and stayed with them for a time before returning to Jerusalem (Acts 9:46-48).

What is interesting about this event is that the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentile believers **before Peter finished his message** (Acts 10:44). It is significant that up to this point, Peter had given a brief history of Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry and preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to them. When he said that *“through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* the Lord interrupted him by sending the Holy Spirit *“on all them which heard the Word”* (Acts 10:43-44). While he undoubtedly had a full Kingdom message in mind, he did not get to the part about repentance and baptism for the remission of sins as he had on Pentecost.

Up to this point, his message was compatible with both the Kingdom gospel and the Grace gospel preached by the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 15:3-4). We believe that at this point God intervened by saving Cornelius and those with him who believed what they heard, and placed them into the Church which is Christ’s Body. Because the Kingdom program was already being superseded by the Dispensation of Grace, God’s purpose in saving these Gentiles was to prepare Peter and the other Kingdom leaders to accept both Saul, also known as Paul, and his message as being from the Lord. When he was confronted by those in Jerusalem because he had gone *“into men uncircumcised and didst eat with them”* (Acts 11:1-3)¹, he explained why he did what he did by telling how God had specifically sent him there and what took place, saying *“what was I, that I should withstand God”* (Acts 10:17). We know that Peter only came to an understanding of “why” this took place when he later learned about the purpose of the

Dispensation of Grace from Paul (Gal. 2:1-10; cf. II Pet. 2:15-16). The timing and the manner in which Peter was sent to Cornelius provides strong proof that the Dispensation of Grace began with Paul's conversion and that the fading away of Israel had already begun. A major dispensational change had to have taken place for Peter to have been sent to Cornelius in the manner and at the time that he was.

The Jerusalem Council

When a controversy over circumcision in the Gentile churches arose in Antioch, Paul, Barnabas, and other leaders went to Jerusalem to have a hearing before the apostles and elders of the church there (Acts 15:1-2). After much disputing over the matter, Peter took the floor and reminded them how God had used him to bring salvation to the Gentiles (Acts 15:3-11). This group of leaders then listened to what Paul and Barnabas had to say about how the Lord was using them among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). James then stood up and defended their ministry to the Gentiles and explained why they should not be put under the Law of Moses (Acts 15:13-21).

Our point here is that in defending Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, Peter referred back to the events recorded in Acts chapter ten to substantiate what he had to say. In other words, he believed that something new was taking place when the Lord sent him to Cornelius and that it was related to Paul's message and ministry to the Gentiles. James, the apostles, the elders, and the whole church agreed and sent letters of acknowledgement to the believing Gentiles in Antioch and the regions of Syria and Cilicia asking only that they "*abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication*" (Acts 15:22-29).

That they specifically sent letters to the Gentile believers in the regions of Syria and Cilicia confirms that Paul's early ministry was the same then as it was at this time (Acts 15:23; cf. Gal. 1:18-21; Acts 9:26-30; Tarsus is in Cilicia). More will be said on this and the timing of the Jerusalem Council when we deal with the Acts Thirteen position.

Paul's Own Testimony

When giving his testimony, the Apostle Paul often connected his salvation experience to his call into the ministry and the message he preached. This provides formidable Scriptural evidence that Paul received the call to his ministry as the Apostle to the Gentiles at the time of his conversion and began receiving special revelation of the doctrines of grace shortly thereafter.

Acts 21:37-22:22: In this passage, Paul has been rescued from the Jews who were trying to kill him because he was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple. When Paul received permission to address the crowd from the Roman commander he began by recounting

how he persecuted the Church and was saved by the Lord Jesus Christ while on his way to Damascus. As instructed by the Lord, Paul went on to Damascus and met Ananias who gave him a message from the Lord. In this account Paul adds some details that are not found in Acts nine. In chapter nine, we find the Lord Jesus telling Ananias through a vision that Paul was *“a chosen vessel”* who was to bear His name *“before the Gentiles, and kings, and the Children of Israel”* and that he would suffer for His *“name’s sake”* (Acts 9:15-16). But it does not tell us that Ananias told Paul this. However, in Acts twenty-two, Paul specifically tells us that Ananias did relay a message from the Lord to him. *“And he (Ananias) said, the God of our fathers hath chosen thee (Saul), that thou shouldest know His will and see the Just One and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness **unto all men** of what thou hast seen and heard”* (Acts 22:14-15).

In chapter nine, Paul’s commission is stated as being to *“the Gentiles and kings, and the Children of Israel”*, which is in the opposite order of the Kingdom commission given to Peter and the eleven (see Acts 1:6-9). In his testimony, Paul simply says that he was sent to be *“a witness unto all men”* of what he had already seen and heard (Acts 22:15). That it is condensed to *“all men”* in this account infers that under his commission there was no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles. This could never be said of the Kingdom commission, which emphasizes Israel’s covenant position as God’s chosen people. In fact, the basis of the Kingdom message rests on the fact that God would send the Messiah to deliver Israel from her Gentile enemies and forgive her of her iniquity (Jer. 23:1-6; 31:31-34; etc.).

As Paul went on with his story, he tells his hearers about what took place when he returned to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (cf. Gal. 1:17-18). At that time he went into the Temple to pray. While there he went into a trance and had a vision of the Lord who said to him, *“make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me”* (Acts 22:17-18). Paul protested, thinking that hearing about how God had changed him from a “persecutor” into a “proclaimer” of Christ would cause the Jews to consider what he had to say. The Lord’s response was to command Paul to leave Jerusalem as He was sending him to the Gentiles (Acts 22:19-21).

When Paul mentioned the Gentiles, the Jews began calling for his death and the Roman soldiers took him into their barracks for safety (Acts 22:22-24). Our point here is that Paul was defending his God-given ministry to the Gentiles by showing its relationship to what the Lord told him in Damascus through Ananias and three years later in the Temple at Jerusalem. Obviously he intended that his audience understand his calling into the ministry by the Lord in the same context as the ministry that he was involved in at the time he was speaking to them. In other words, Paul was saying that his present work among the Gentiles was directly related to him having been sent as a witness to *“all men”* at the time of his conversion, and that the Lord re-asserted this to him the first time he returned to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.

Acts 26:1-32: In this passage we find Paul being held in Caesarea where the commander of the Roman garrison had sent him because of a plot against his life by the Jews in Jerusalem

(Acts 23:12-35). The Apostle would remain in prison in Caesarea for more than two years (Acts 24:27).

Eventually Paul had an opportunity to give his testimony before King Agrippa II, a great-grandson of Herod the Great (Acts 25:1-26:32). First, he reviewed his past life as a Pharisee (Acts 26:2-5), then Paul defended himself by stating that what he was being charged with was in line with God's promise to Israel concerning the resurrection of the dead (Acts 26:6-8). He used this same defense before the council in Jerusalem and before Felix (Acts 23:6-10; 24:10-21). The charges brought against Paul by the Jews were evidently connected to his claim that Jesus, who had been put to death, was alive (Acts 25:18,19). Paul was preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord for the forgiveness of sins for both Jews and Gentiles and showing that the Jesus he preached was the same Jesus who is the Messiah of Israel (cf. Acts 26:21-23).

He was not saying that he was preaching the exact same message as Peter and the eleven did, but that the foundation of his message was foundational to the Kingdom message as well. All of God's redemptive purposes are dependent on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and the fact of His death, burial and resurrection. Apart from Christ and His "love work" of the cross, there is no good news for man. Jesus Christ as Redeemer and the promise of a physical resurrection are essential to the hope of believers of every dispensation. This is true whether or not they had precise revelation as we do in the present Dispensation of Grace or if it was still veiled as in the types and shadow of the Law as it was in the time of the Old Testament. Peter and Paul preached the same Jesus Christ but as representatives of different dispensations. Thus, there were differences in the details of their respective messages.

Paul went on to tell how in his zeal for God he had been actively engaged in persecuting those who believed on the name of Christ (Acts 26:9-12; cf. Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-6) when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:12-15; cf. 9:1-5). Here Paul adds some information about his conversation with the Lord that took place at that time that is not found in the other accounts of this history changing event.

In Acts nine and twenty-two, it is simply stated that the Lord told Paul to *"arise, and go into the city (Damascus), and it shall be told unto thee what thou must do"* (Acts 9:6; 22:10). But here, in his testimony before Agrippa, Paul gives us a fuller account of what Jesus said to him that day. *"But rise, and stand upon thy feet" for I have appeared unto thee **for this purpose**, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear (reveal) unto thee; delivering thee from the people (Israel), and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me"* (Acts 26:16-18). We learn several important things from what the Apostle tells us here about the day that the Lord gloriously appeared to him.

First, Jesus Christ appeared to Saul/Paul for the express purpose of making him a minister (v. 16a). As Paul's ministry was that of the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12, it seems evident that this is where he received his calling to that office (Acts 9:15; cf. Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1,15-16; II Tim. 1:10-11).

Second, the Lord appeared to Paul that he might be an eyewitness to the fact of His resurrection (v. 16b; cf. I Cor. 15:1-8). Paul not only saw the risen Christ but, like the twelve, he also received his commission as an Apostle directly from Him (Gal. 1:11-12; Tit. 1:3; cf. Lk. 6:12-16; cf. Matt. 10:1-2; Lk. 9:1-2).

Third, the Lord did not reveal everything He had for Paul all at one time but would progressively reveal the details of the message that He sent Paul to proclaim (v.16c).

Fourth, the Lord promised to deliver Paul from those who sought to harm him, both of the Jews and of the Gentiles (v.17a). Many instances of this being fulfilled are found in the Scriptures (II Tim. 3:11; cf. Acts 13:44-52; 14:1-20; etc.).

Fifth, the Lord commissioned Paul to go the Gentiles at that time (v. 17b; cf. Acts 9:15; 22:12-15).

Sixth, Paul's mission was to offer salvation to the Gentiles through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 18).

Seventh, that Paul obeyed this vision and took his message to the Jews and the Gentiles (vs. 19-20).

Eighth, that it was "*for these causes*", that is for preaching the message he received that day on the road to Damascus to Jew and Gentile alike, that the Jews had tried to kill him (v.21; cf Acts 21:27-28).

We recognize the fact that there is some difficulty in reconciling the order of events given in verse 20 with the record of Paul's activities that are found earlier in Acts and in his epistles. However, that does not change what is clearly stated in verses 12-18. Paul was commissioned to go to the Gentiles right there on the road to Damascus. Note that the message he preached in Damascus he also preached to the Jews and the Gentiles.

I Corinthians 15:9-10: In chapter fifteen of I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul forcefully presents the importance of Christ's resurrection to the Gospel of the Grace of God. He starts out by reminding the Corinthians that they were saved and have their standing before God through the Gospel that he preached to them (I Cor. 15:1-2). His concern was that those who denied that there was an actual resurrection of Christ from the dead had influenced them or that believers would be physically resurrected. He points out that the gospel that they had believed and been saved through was based on the facts of Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (I Cor. 15:3-4). His point is that if they were saved through faith that Christ was raised from the dead but it wasn't true, their faith in Christ was pointless, or "*in vain*" (I Cor.

15:2,12,18). The believer's assurance only comes from the grand fact that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead (I Cor. 15:19-22 ff.).

To prove his argument Paul explains that the twelve Kingdom Apostles were eyewitnesses to the fact of Christ's resurrection as were more than five hundred other believers, including James, the Lord's half-brother (I Cor. 15:5-7). And last, Paul claims that he himself also saw the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:8-10). Even though Paul was not qualified in any way to be an apostle, the Lord graciously appeared to him on the road to Damascus and commissioned him as the Apostle of Grace (I Cor. 15:10; cf. Gal. 2:9; Acts 9:15-17; 22:11-15; 26: 14-18). The grace which was bestowed upon Paul is shown to be directly tied to his having personally seen the risen Christ. Note the statements from the Acts record; ***"Jesus that appeared unto thee"*** (Acts 9:17); ***"that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard"*** (Acts 22:14-15); ***"for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness..."*** (Acts 26:16ff.).

Galatians 1:6-2:10: In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul vigorously defended his apostleship and message of grace against the message of the Judaizers who had come in preaching a corrupted gospel that mixed Law with Grace. In this passage he is making it clear that his message, or gospel, was not the same as the message committed to the Apostle Peter.

Having established the fact that his apostleship was not conferred on him by any group of mere men or an individual, but by Jesus Christ Himself, whose authority comes through the Father (Gal. 1:1), Paul then expressed his dismay that the saints in Galatia were so quickly turning away from the Gospel of Grace to a perverted message, a different kind of message, that was not good news at all (Gal. 1:6-7). He then told them that anybody who came to them with a message that was different than the one he had preached to them, that person should be considered as one who is under condemnation (Acts 1:8-9). He also declared that his motivation was not to please men but to serve the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Paul goes on to establish the fact that, like his apostolic commission, he received his corresponding apostolic message directly from the risen Christ as well (Gal. 1:11-12; cf. v. 1:1). That he particularly says that he received it ***"by the revelation of Jesus Christ"*** tells us that his message was not already known by men but directly revealed to him by the Lord Jesus. It is this important point that the rest of the epistle is based on.

Having declared that he received both his commission and message directly from the Lord, Paul now reminds the Galatians of his former conduct as a zealous Jew (Gal. 1:13-14). He had tried to destroy the Church, but in God's time He had called him by His grace for the purpose of revealing his Son in him that he might preach Christ among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16a). After this calling, which took place while on the road to Damascus, Paul did not consult any man about the message he would preach and did not go immediately to Jerusalem, which was the seat of the apostles' authority. Instead he went to Arabia and then returned to

Damascus (Gal. 1:16b-17). It was not until three years after his conversion that he went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter (Gal. 1:18). Some of the details of this visit are found in Acts 22:17-21. Paul met with Peter and James at this time (Gal. 1:19) and then went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, remaining unknown to the churches that were in Judea (Gal. 1:19-22).

Paul qualified everything he was writing with the statement *“Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not”* (Gal. 1:20-22). He wanted to nail down the fact that he received his message from the Lord Himself and was not preaching the Kingdom Gospel that Peter and the other apostles did. That the churches in Judea only heard that this former persecutor was now preaching the faith that he formally was attempting to destroy (Acts 1:23-24) does not mean that he was preaching the Kingdom Gospel, but that he was preaching Christ. Of course, they assumed that he was preaching Christ according to prophecy because that was the only message that they knew anything about at that time. Note that Paul does not give us any other information to go along with this series of events other than that the Gospel he preached was given to him by the Lord. What he is defending is this special revelation and the fact that he received it before he ever met with any of the Kingdom apostles.

Fourteen years after his conversion, Paul went a second time to Jerusalem where he met privately with Peter, James, and John, the chief leaders in the Church there. We should note here that this was not the conference of Acts fifteen which was held during Paul's third trip to Jerusalem and was a public meeting with all the apostles and elders (Acts 15:1-6ff.) rather than the private one described in Galatians. More will be said on this subject later when we deal with the Acts Thirteen position. His purpose was to explain the Gospel message that he was already preaching to them so that it would not be undermined by them because of a lack of understanding (Gal. 2:1-2). That he refused to have Titus circumcised and strongly withstood the false teachers (Gal. 2:3-4) at this time tells us that the Grace Gospel was already being proclaimed and that the Body of Christ was already in existence. Paul's refusal to allow the demands of the Law to be imposed on Gentile believers was to make sure that *“the truth of the Gospel might continue”* (Gal. 2:5). He was defending his Christ-revealed message of Grace to keep it from being corrupted by the co-mingling of it with the Law of Moses. We do not know exactly when Titus became a believer, but we know that it was before the time of this meeting, which was sometime before Paul's first apostolic missionary journey (Acts 12:25-13:3).

Paul made it clear that James, Peter and John *“added nothing”* to his knowledge, that is they were not able to teach him anything, concerning the Good News about Jesus Christ (Gal. 2:6). Instead, the opposite was true. They learned from him about how God had commissioned him with the Gospel of the Gentiles (the uncircumcision) just as Peter was with the Gospel of the Jews (the circumcision) (Gal. 2:6-8). Recognizing that the Gospel of Grace was particularly given to Paul, Peter, James and John agreed to limit their ministry to preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom to the Jews while Paul was to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel of Grace (Gal. 2:9-10).

Two things are important to the subject at hand. One is that this meeting that Paul had with James, Peter, and John took place “before” the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas by the church at Antioch that is recorded in Acts thirteen (Acts 12:25-13:3). Just as these three leaders at Jerusalem privately recognized and verified the ministry that Paul was already engaged in, the leaders in the church at Antioch recognized and verified Paul’s ministry publicly under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The order and manner of these events was necessary so that those in the Jerusalem Church would not misunderstand what was happening when Paul was publicly commissioned in Antioch. A serious controversy could have arisen immediately if those in Jerusalem had not already acknowledged and approved Paul’s mission and message to the Gentiles when they heard about the Church at Antioch sending him out to the Gentiles.

The other thing, as we have already mentioned, is that the ministry and message of Paul that James, Peter, and John endorsed was the ministry and message the Lord charged Paul with at the time of his conversion, and by then he had already been laboring under it for fourteen years. There is no doubt that in this passage of Scripture Paul is defending his God-given message of Grace and Apostolic authority. It is important to note that he does not mention having received another commission or message between Galatians 1:16 and 2:1. His authority to rebuke Peter to his face (Gal. 2:11-14) and proclaim justification apart from the Law is found in Galatians 1:11-16.

Philippians 3:1-11: In this passage, the Apostle Paul is warning the saints at Philippi against the Judaizers who would mingle Law and Grace by imposing the rite of circumcision on them if they were given a chance. He tells them to beware of these evil workers and points out that those who have trusted Christ alone and are not trusting in the works of the flesh are the true circumcision (Phil. 3:1-3; cf. Col. 2:13-14). He then points out that if anyone ever thought they were right with God because of the fleshly works of the Law it was him. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the Church (Phil. 3:4-6). He then goes on to declare that his self-righteousness based on his ability to keep the Law of Moses simply was insufficient and so he rejected it all as rubbish and turned to Christ alone that he might have the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Him (Phil 3:7-9; cf. II Cor. 5:21). The result being to personally know Christ and experience His resurrection power in his life as he was being conformed into Christ-likeness through his new identity with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Phil 3:10-11; cf. Rom. 6:1-11).

As we have already seen, Paul makes it clear that he was saved and commissioned when Jesus Christ appeared on the road to Damascus. Here he tells us that he turned from every thing that he had thought made him in some way acceptable to God in favor of faith alone in Christ alone that he might be found righteous in God’s sight. This obviously took place when the Lord Jesus appeared to him while he was involved in persecuting the Kingdom believers as he mistakenly thought that his zeal in doing so commended him to God (Phil. 3:6a).

If Paul had been saved into the Kingdom Church and then later transferred into the Body of Christ, as some think, he would not have made the claim that he renounced all of the things that we find listed in this passage. Under the Kingdom program, there is a distinction

between the Jews who are of “the commonwealth of Israel” and therefore “children of the Covenants of Promise”, and the Gentiles, who are not (cf. Eph. 2:11-12). As we have noted earlier, in the Kingdom circumcision will be required, and the Law, with some revisions, will be kept by believing Israel. It is true that in the Kingdom program salvation is still essentially through faith in Christ, but the Jews will have a place of authority over the Gentiles because of their covenant relationship with God, and so, along with circumcision, Sabbath keeping, water baptism and many other elements of Law will be kept to demonstrate the reality of their faith in Christ. None of this is true of the Dispensation of Grace. Paul’s Hebrew identity in itself would not make him acceptable to God, but he could not renounce it as worthless under the terms of the Kingdom program. Again we see that Paul’s message of Grace is directly related to the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus.

I Timothy 1:8-17: In this letter to Timothy, Paul is giving this young pastor instructions and encouragement to stand strong in the faith. In the passage we are looking at he explains that the proper use of the Law today is to convict the ungodly of sin (I Tim. 1:8-10) in accord with the Gospel message that had been committed to his trust (I Tim. 1:11). He then goes on to voice his thankfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ who enabled him to do the ministry He had called him to (I Tim. 1:12). Before being placed into the Gospel ministry Paul says he had been “*a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious*” man, but through the “*exceeding abundant*” grace of the Lord he had obtained mercy (I Tim. 1:13-14). As we have already seen, this change in Paul’s life took place at the time the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul emphasizes what he says next by preceding it with the statement, “*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance*” (I Tim 1:15a). This tells us that what follows is significant and we should pay close attention to it. First, we read that “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*” (I Tim. 1:15b). This is a most wonderful fact that we should ever rejoice in. The incarnation of the Son of God was for the purpose of reconciling lost humanity to God. This is an interdispensational truth that we must always keep in mind as we study our Bibles and seek God’s will for our lives.

Second, we read that Paul considered himself to be “*chief*”, or the foremost, of sinners (I Tim. 1:15c.). Of course, he wasn’t the first sinner because that distinction belongs to Adam (Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:21-22), and there were many generations of sinful men and women that came and went between the time of Adam and the time of Paul. So what did Paul mean that he was the “chief” sinner? I believe that the next verse explains it. “*Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to all which should hereafter believe on Him to everlasting life*” (I Tim. 1:16).

Paul is simply stating here that the reason God showed him mercy in saving him was for the express purpose of using him to demonstrate His patience by using Paul as the prototype, or pattern, of those who from that time on would believe on Christ and receive eternal life (cf. II Pet. 3:15). The patience demonstrated is that, instead of pouring out His wrath on a God-rejecting world in the Tribulation, the Lord interrupted the prophetic Kingdom program by graciously showing mercy to His foremost persecutor and saving him in Gentile territory apart

from the requirements to be saved through the Kingdom Gospel. Even though he wrote this letter over thirty years after his conversion, Paul was compelled to give praise to his Savior when he wrote about what He had done on his, and our, behalf. *“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen”* (I Tim. 1:17).

II Timothy 1:6-12: In his second letter to Timothy, Paul reminds him that God has not given believers *“the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (II Tim. 1:6-7) and that because of this he had no reason to be *“ashamed of the testimony”* of Jesus Christ or of Paul, the Lord’s *“prisoner”* (II Tim. 1:8). Instead of being silenced by those who reject the Grace Gospel and the distinctive nature of Paul’s apostolic ministry and message, Timothy was admonished to be willing to suffer for the Gospel, trusting in the power of God to see him through. This is God’s will for believers today just as it was for Timothy when Paul penned this letter almost two thousand years ago.

Paul then goes on to remind Timothy that when we become saved we are also called to holiness according to God’s own purpose of grace. Although this was God’s plan even before the time of Creation, it has only now been revealed through *“the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel”* (II Tim. 1:9-10). We believe that the *“appearance”* of Christ referred to here is his appearance to Paul when he was saved on the road to Damascus and *“appointed a preacher and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles”* (II Tim. 1:11; cf. Acts 9:15-17; 22:14-15; 26:16-18; I Cor. 15:8-10). Paul’s own testimony was that he was not ashamed of suffering because he preached Christ in accord with the Gospel message and apostleship given to him by the Lord Jesus Himself, because he was persuaded that the Lord would not fail him or the carrying out of His purpose in the Gospel of Grace (II Tim. 1:12). Again we find the Apostle Paul linking his initial salvation with his Christ-given ministry and message.

Conclusion

Because there is a clear break in the prophetic Kingdom program in the events of Acts chapters nine and ten and the Apostle Paul consistently refers to the time of his conversion on the road to Damascus in the same context as his apostolic ministry and message of grace, we believe that the Dispensation of Grace began with Paul’s conversion and that the Church, which is Christ’s Body, began at the same time. Paul, being both a Roman citizen and a Jew was representative of the nature of the Body of Christ in which Jew and Gentile are seen as one body or *“one new man”* in their identity with Christ (see Eph. 2:14-16; cf. Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 3:11).

If it is important that we know when the Dispensation of Grace began, and we believe that it is, then there should be strong Scriptural indicators that direct us to that point in time. We believe that we have shown from the Bible that these indicators do exist and they point us to the record of the Apostle Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus as the benchmark that identifies the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace. The testimony of the inspired word of

God, both in the book of Acts and in Paul's letters, tells us that Jesus Christ's appearance to Paul at that crucial time in Israel's history is the turning point that marks both Israel's fall and the birth of the Church which is His Body.

ALTERNATE POSITION: Acts 11

Those who hold to the Acts Eleven position generally believe that the Dispensation of Grace began with the conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus but reason that the Church, being a body made up of Jews and Gentiles could not have come into existence with the salvation of Paul alone. They say that he could not have been its first member as he was only one person and was a Jew. In their thinking, because the Church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles it is only logical that the Church could not have begun until a Gentile was saved to join Paul, which they say took place in Acts Eleven. Whether one of each would do or if they think it would take a larger number of Jews and Gentiles to constitute the Church is not clear. Those holding this modified Acts Nine position believe the first Gentiles were saved into the Body of Christ while Paul was ministering in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. This would have been at least three years after his conversion that Paul visited there (Gal. 1:18-21).

We believe that the Acts Eleven position has some interesting points but that it is not the correct view. First, because of the reasons we have already outlined, and second, we think that they have misunderstood Paul's teaching of the concept of both Jew and Gentile in One Body.

What Paul actually teaches is that the invitation to salvation is open to both Jews and Gentiles without national distinction, which is not true of the Kingdom program where the Gentiles must come to God through believing Israel (Isa. 60:1-3; 61:6; Zech. 8:20-23). In the Mystery program of Grace, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile makes no difference. Each person is seen as an individual who upon hearing the Gospel and believing it will be saved (Rom. 10:12). God is not working through any particular nation today as is the case in the Kingdom program. However, for believers, in their new identity with Christ, there is no recognition of Jew or Gentile.

Paul's definition of the Body of Christ is that in Christ Jews and Gentiles become "*one new man*" (Eph. 2:14-15). The main point of the Gospel of Grace is that God is saving sinners, not Jews and Gentiles as such (Rom. 3:19-23ff.). Apart from Christ there is a distinction between Jews and Gentiles as God is preserving the Jews as a people because He still has a future purpose for them. But the Jews have no special standing or advantage over the Gentiles in this present Dispensation. Jews and Gentiles alike are simply seen as being "in Adam", that is to say, as sinners in need of redemption.

The believer has "*put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all*" (Col. 3:10-11; cf. Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 10:32). The Body does not consist of Jews and Gentiles but of redeemed men and women. Paul's purpose in saying that God has made "*both one*" and "*reconciled both unto God in One Body*" (Eph. 2:14-18) is not to define the Body of Christ as a joint body but to show that it

makes no difference if one is a Jew or a Gentile in the Dispensation of Grace. They both must come to the Lord the same way to be saved, *“for there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom. 10:12-13). In Christ they are neither Jew nor Gentile, but are made *“one new man”* (Eph. 2:14-15).

We believe that when Paul was saved in Acts nine he was the first person placed “into the Body of Christ” and sealed by the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of his resurrection at the time of the Rapture of the Church to receive its inheritance in heavenly places (Eph. 1:10-14,18-20; 2:5-7). As the first member of the Body of Christ, he serves as a pattern to the Church. Christ began forming the Church which is His Body with Paul and will complete it with the last individual who trusts Christ as Savior before the Church is *“caught up”* to be with the Lord (I Thess. 4:13-18).

ALTERNATE POSITION: Acts 13

Those who hold to this position point to Acts 13:1-3 as evidence that the Body of Christ could not have begun until the leaders of the Church at Antioch officially separated Paul unto his God-given ministry. They see Acts 14:27 as proof that the Lord did not open the door of faith to the Gentiles until after this formal separation of Paul and Barnabus to go to the Gentiles. But, as we have already seen, Paul brought Titus to Jerusalem with him as a representative of the Gentile churches that already existed before the commissioning of Paul and Barnabus in Acts chapter thirteen took place (Gal. 2:1-3). Also, at the time of the Jerusalem Council, there were Gentile churches in the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:22-23ff.). The only evidence of Paul ever going to these areas is found in Galatians where Paul says he went to Jerusalem and then to Syria and Cilicia three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18-21). The events of Acts thirteen did not take place until eleven years later.

Also, when considering the Acts Thirteen position, it must be remembered that it had already been acknowledged by the Kingdom Apostles that *“repentance unto life”* had been granted to the Gentiles many years earlier (Acts 11:1-2,18)². And, as we have mentioned, there were already Gentile churches in existence in Syria and Cilicia. Considering this and the fact that verse 27 does not stand alone but must be understood within the context of Acts 14:24-28; the report that God had *“opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* (Acts 14:27) was obviously not meant to be a definitive statement concerning the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace or of the Body of Christ. Instead, it should be understood as simply a report on what God had done among the Gentiles through Paul and Barnabas during the missionary journey that is recorded in Acts thirteen and fourteen. Notice what it says about their return to Antioch at the end of this journey: *“and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the Grace of God for **the work which they fulfilled**”* (Acts 14:26; cf. 13:1-4). Just as they had completed their earlier mission of delivering aid to the saints in Judea (see Acts 11:28-30; 12:25), they had also completed this mission trip.

The work that they were separated to here was this particular mission trip rather than to begin the church. Note well that it says that they *“fulfilled”*, or completed, the work to which they had been *“recommended (literally ‘committed’) to the grace of God for.”* Paul and Barnabus completed that journey which produced much spiritual fruit among the Gentiles, but Paul certainly had not fulfilled the work of dispensing the Grace of God as his ministry went on for over twenty more years. He completed a “mission trip”, which is the subject at hand here, but not his commission, which was given to him long before this trip was taken. And the Body of Christ still owns his commission to *“make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery”* as its own and will continue to labor under it until the time of the Rapture.

We should also note here that it was the Holy Spirit that sent Paul and Barnabas out on this mission trip (Acts 13:2). Paul is very clear that it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who commissioned him to the ministry of the Gospel of the Grace of God (Gal. 1:11-12; I Tim. 1:12-16). Yes, Paul was open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but we must keep in mind that he not only received his commission from Him, but he also primarily worked under the direct

instructions of Jesus Christ Himself (Acts 9:4-16; 18:9-11; 22:17-22; Rom. 1:3-5; 23:10-11; Gal. 1:1,11-12; I Tim. 1:1).

Proponents of the Acts Thirteen position sometimes point to the fact that from Acts thirteen on Saul of Tarsus is always referred to as Paul (Acts 13:9) as evidence that the Dispensation of Grace did not begin until then. We agree that this is a significant fact, but deny that it marks the beginning of the Body of Christ. Some point out that the words "*is called*" are in Italics in our English Bibles, meaning they are not in the original Greek but have been supplied by the translators for clarity. They maintain that Paul was only known as Saul before that time and this name change here supports their position. To this we would point out that the word translated "also" is in the original Greek, which means that the translators correctly supplied the words "*is called*" where they did to give us a faithful translation of what Luke meant. So, the Scriptures do not say that Saul's name was changed to Paul at that time, but simply that he was "*also called Paul*" (Acts 13:9). The shift to using His Greek name is both symbolic and cultural. Paul's apostolic ministry and message had been acknowledged by James, Peter and John in Jerusalem and now was publicly confirmed by the leaders at Antioch. The change in the use of names pictures the transition that was already in progress, the decline of Israel and the rise of the Body of Christ. His influence was expanding and he would now be reaching ever farther into the heavily Greek influenced world of the Gentiles so it was appropriate for him to go by the name Paul rather than Saul. His being formally sent out by the church at Antioch was not his commissioning as the Apostle of the Gentiles, but it certainly was a milestone for his ongoing and growing ministry to the Gentiles.

Another problem with this view is that if Acts 13:1-3 marks Paul's commission as the Apostle of the Gentiles, Barnabus must be acknowledged as holding the same office. The Scriptures clearly say that both men were specifically called to this particular mission. In fact, Barnabus is named first, which would mean he was at least Paul's equal as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's exclusive claims elsewhere to be "the Apostle to the Gentiles" do not allow for this.

Something else that is brought up is that right after his conversion Paul's preaching focused on the fact that Jesus was the Christ, or Messiah, of Israel (Acts 9:20,22). The point being that this proves that Paul preached the Kingdom message until he was separated to go to the Gentiles. However, Paul still used the same approach in his preaching long after his commissioning in Acts thirteen. In Thessalonica "*Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is Christ*" (Acts 17:2-3; cf Acts 18:5,28).

What Paul did on a regular basis during his apostolic journeys was to go first to the synagogues where he could find a ready audience. In order to get them to take the "*preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*" (Rom. 16:25) seriously, he had to first convince them that the Jesus he was preaching was indeed the Christ, or Messiah, of Israel. If they did not believe that, they would, just as Jews do today, simply discount his message as not

being for the Jews because they were looking for the Anointed One that God, through Moses and the Prophets, had promised to send to them. Paul's message was that the Crucified One is in truth the Christ of Israel but, having been rejected by His own people, a new unprophesied dispensation was now in effect. It is important to keep in mind that Jesus Christ is central to both the Kingdom Gospel of Prophecy and the Grace Gospel of Mystery.

It is more than just an interesting fact that the Apostle Paul started with the Person of Jesus Christ in presenting the Grace Gospel to the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but in Athens he went back to the beginning of creation (Acts. 17:16-31). The Jews understood and accepted the fact that God was the Creator of all things, but the idolatrous philosophers of Athens did not believe in One True Creator God. Paul approached each group in accordance with their worldview. It is much easier to reach unsaved people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ when we start on a level of understanding that they can relate to and then address the needs of their heart by presenting Jesus Christ as the answer. Only through faith in Him alone can any man or woman be reconciled to God and find true peace of heart and mind.

Some have assumed that the Apostle Paul's meeting with James, Peter, and John described in Galatians 2:1-10 took place during the time he was in Jerusalem for the council meeting of the apostles and elders of the church there (Acts 15:1-30). However, we believe that the Scriptural evidence indicates that the meeting mentioned in Galatians actually took place a few years earlier during Paul and Barnabas' visit to deliver the famine relief money collected in Antioch for the saints at Jerusalem (Acts 11:26-30; 12:25). There are several reasons that we think this is so, reasons that we will soon get to. But first, it seems best if we review the North and South Galatia theories² about the destination of Paul's letter to "*the Churches of Galatia*" (Gal. 1:2).

The North Galatia theory is that Paul wrote his letter to churches that were located in the northern part of the Roman Province of Galatia. If the letter was sent to churches in North Galatia, it would mean that he was writing to churches that were established during his second missionary journey. In turn, this would mean that Galatians was written after Paul's second missionary journey, probably during his third missionary journey from either Ephesus in A.D. 54 or Macedonia in A.D. 55. In that case, it would be possible for Paul's meeting with James, Peter, and John to have taken place while Paul was in Jerusalem for the council meeting of Acts 15. This time frame would allow for the Acts 13 position on the Beginning of the Church. However, if this theory does not hold up, there is no basis for the Acts 13 position as Galatians would have been written before Acts 15 and the meeting with James, Peter, and John would have to have been somewhere in the time frame of Acts 11 and 12. Of course, this would mean that Paul had been "preaching Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" long before his Acts 13 commissioning.

The South Galatia theory is that Paul was writing to churches in southern Galatia and this letter was originally sent to the churches that he started during his first mission trip. It most likely would have been written after his return to Antioch in A.D. 49. If this is the case, then Galatians would have been Paul's earliest letter.

The Roman Province of Galatia bordered the Black Sea, Bithynia, and Pontus in the North, Asia on the West, Cappadocia on the East and Lycia, Pamphylia, and Cilicia in the South. Lycaonia, Pisidia, and part of Phrygia were situated within the southern part of the Province of Galatia. It is important to note here that Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia were all located in South Galatia, and are all places that Paul visited on his first missionary journey in A.D 47-48. It was most probably the churches he founded in this area that his Galatian letter is addressed to. If so, he could have written it from Perga or Attalia (Acts 14:24-25) before returning to Antioch in Syria. Or, it is more likely that he wrote it soon after returning to Antioch (Acts 14:26-28), where the Scriptures say that he stayed for some time before some men came from Judea and started a fuss over circumcision (Acts 14:26-15:1).

The strongest argument against the North Galatia Theory is that there is no Scriptural proof that Paul ever went into that area. On the other hand, we know that he planted churches in South Galatia and visited those churches during his other missionary journeys. Other reasons that we believe that Paul's Galatian letter was addressed to the churches in the South are as follows:

1. As we have already noted, Paul and Barnabas had visited the cities of Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Antioch of Pisidia, which were all in South Galatia, and established churches there. This fact is clearly documented in Scripture (Acts 13:14-14:23). But there is no Scriptural proof that Paul went ever into northern Galatia. However, we do know that Peter wrote to Kingdom believers who were in northern Galatia (I Pet. 1:1). That his letter is also addressed to dispersed Jews in Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia indicates that northern Galatia is in view, as all of these other areas, except Asia, border the northern part of the province. And we are specifically told that Paul was not allowed to minister in Asia or Bithynia. Obviously then, Peter was writing to Kingdom saints who had become believers before Paul's first missionary journey, perhaps as early as Acts 2 (Acts 2:8-11).
2. Since Barnabas did not travel with Paul on his second missionary journey, when it is assumed that he went to North Galatia, Paul's familiar reference to him in Galatians (Gal. 2:1,9,13) cannot be explained. Barnabas would not have been personally known there as he was in the South Galatia churches. It is obvious that Barnabas would need no introduction to the churches of South Galatia, as he was Paul's traveling companion when he first went there. Paul simply assumed that his readers knew him.
3. There were Jews in the cities of South Galatia that could have been responsible for the Judaizing of the Galatian churches (Acts 13:41-51; 14:1-2; 16:1-3). There were also believing Jews from Judea who may have visited some of the churches in Galatia, teaching the saints there that they must be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1,5; cf. Gal. 6:12-13). But, in light of Galatians 2:4, it seems most likely that the Jews who resisted Paul in his ministry to the Galatians are the same ones who were bringing the false doctrine into the churches he had established in the cities he visited (Acts 13:45; 14:1).

4. The Scriptural evidence indicates that Paul's meeting with James, Peter, and John at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10) was not the same as the General Council Meeting of Acts 15 with all of the apostles and elders.
- a. Galatians speaks of a private meeting with the three foremost leaders of the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:2,9), while Acts records a public meeting with all of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem present (Acts 15:2,4,6,23).
 - b. In Galatians, Titus, a Gentile, is particularly mentioned as going to Jerusalem for the meeting with James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:1,3). In the Acts 15 meeting, Titus is not mentioned and it seems that only believing Jews were present.
 - c. In Galatians, Paul indicates that it was on his second visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18; 2:1) that his private meeting with James, Peter, and John took place. The Acts 15 council meeting took place during Paul's third visit. The first visit took place in Acts 9:26-29; the second in 11:28-29 with 12:25; and the third in Acts 15:1-30.
 - d. That Paul had to confront Peter over the issue of Jewish-Gentile fellowship (Gal. 2:11-14) after the meeting described in Galatians 2:1-10 indicates that the meeting of Acts 15 had not yet taken place. We can understand that Peter may have vacillated under pressure from men sent by James when they came to Antioch (Gal. 2:11-12), even after he, with James and John, had met with Paul and privately affirmed his message and ministry. But, it is hard to imagine him doing so after the official public decision that the Gentile believers need not be circumcised or keep the Law of Moses had been made. The fact that the apostles and elders, and the whole church at Jerusalem, (Acts 15:22) agreed to write an official letter to the Gentile churches that were in Syria and Cilicia to proclaim their decision (Acts 15:23-29) makes it even more improbable that Peter's hypocritical separation from the Gentile believers took place after the council meeting, especially since Peter and James were the principle defenders of Paul's ministry and message (Acts 15:7-21ff.). After this decision, would James have sent men to Galatia that were not knowledgeable of this? We think not. And who from Jerusalem would have gone on their own, knowing that an official council decision had confirmed Paul's ministry and message.
 - e. Since the controversy over circumcision was the central subject of the Jerusalem council meeting, it seems strange that Paul would mention only his private meeting with three of the leaders at Jerusalem and say nothing of the general council meeting where all the apostles and elders agreed that circumcision was not required for Gentile believers (Acts 15:22-23ff.). The mere mention of it would have added considerable weight to his defense of the Grace Gospel and refutation of the Judaizers who were troubling the churches of Galatia. In fact, the decision of the Jerusalem Council would have taken precedence over Paul's private meeting with

James, Peter and John concerning the subject at hand. Considering the importance of this issue to Paul, there can hardly be any doubt that he would have included the council's decision in his letter if he wrote Galatians after the Acts 15 meeting.

- f. That the leaders of the Jerusalem Church only addressed their official letter to the Gentile brethren in Antioch and the regions of Syria and Cilicia indicates that they did not see a need to write to the churches Paul started on his first missionary trip through South Galatia. Why would they ignore these Gentile churches during such a serious controversy about circumcision and the Law. It would make no sense, unless they somehow knew that the issue had already been dealt with and was no longer an issue in those churches. This would be the case if Paul had already written his letter to the Galatians, a letter that specifically and forcefully deals with the problems of circumcision and Law-keeping that the Judaizers had introduced there and tried to bring into the Church at Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:26-15:2).
- g. The decision to send letters to the regions of Syria and Cilicia tells us that there definitely were Grace churches there. The only record that we have of Paul ever ministering in these areas, with the exception of his time in Antioch, is during his earlier ministry before going out on his first missionary journey (Gal. 1:18-21; cf. Acts 9:30; 15:23).

After His first visit to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-29; Gal. 1:17-20), Paul returned to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30) and later went to Antioch (Acts 11:22-26). Tarsus was the chief city of the Province of Cilicia as Antioch was of Syria. We learn from Galatians that Paul did not limit this time of his life to staying in Tarsus, but ministered in the regions of both Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21). Paul ministered in these two areas for several years before returning to Jerusalem a second time (Acts 11:22-30; Gal. 1:21-22). This second trip to Jerusalem coincides with Paul and Barnabas' journey to Jerusalem to deliver the famine relief offering from the saints at Antioch to the saints at Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30; Gal. 2:1-10). It was Paul's third time going to Jerusalem after his conversion that the Jerusalem council meeting took place (Acts 9:26; 11:29-30; 15:1-2). By the time of his second visit, Paul's Gospel message and apostleship were already clearly defined.

Along with Saul's commissioning (Acts 13:1-3) and he and Paul being identified as the same person (Acts 13:9), some also present the account of a Jew named Bar Jesus and a Gentile named Sergius Paulus as evidence that a new dispensation was starting at this time (Acts 13:6-12). The idea here is that the unbelieving Jew (also known as Elymas the Sorcerer, v.8) being blinded for a season (v.11) in conjunction with a Gentile receiving spiritual sight through faith (vs. 7,12) marks this as the time of the temporary blinding of Israel *"until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in"* (Rom. 11:25) and the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace in which God turns from Israel to the Gentiles.

We agree that this incident does picture what was taking place at the time, but we deny that the time this episode took place marks the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace. As we

have already seen, there were already Gentile believers in the regions of Cilia and Syria before Paul went on this journey. We must be careful when using symbolism to support doctrine because it can be very subjective as it is allegorical in nature. However, if we are going to use this event in Acts 13 as allegorical evidence as to when the Body of Christ actually began, should we not also say that Paul's blindness for a season in Acts 9 must symbolize something as well? Paul was not a false prophet and sorcerer as Bar Jesus was, but a zealous Pharisee. One of the leaders of Israel who rejected Jesus Christ as the true Messiah of Israel that helped lead the nation into unbelief (Acts 7:54-8:4; 9:1-2; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-6; I Tim. 1:12-13). Symbolically, couldn't we also say that Paul's temporary blindness on the Road to Damascus represented the blindness that was demonstrated by Israel when the nation's leaders stoned Stephen after he charged them with resisting the Holy Spirit's testimony that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel (Acts 7:51-8:4).

In Acts 13, we find the first of three formal announcements of what was already taking place (Acts 13:46; 18:6; 28:28; cf. Rom. 11:15,32). The transition from Prophecy to Mystery, from Law to Grace had started small but was now gaining momentum and would soon be in full swing with the opposition to Paul's message by the Jews growing even as more and more Gentiles accepted it as truth. Just as pictured by Bar Jesus and Sergius Paulus, the Jews began to try to turn the Gentiles away from Paul's message because of envy (see Rom. 11:11, cf. Acts 13:8,45; 14:2,19; 15:1; 17:5,13; 18:5-6, 12-13; 19:8-9; 20:2-3). While Paul's blindness in Acts 9 reflects the spiritual blindness of the nation, especially of its leaders, BarJesus' example pictures the apostasy that was overtaking the nation because of its blindness. The blindness of both being temporary because God has not cast Israel away permanently, but will one day purify her through the fires of the Tribulation and restore the nation to its place of favor and privilege among the nations of the earth. Of course, we once again want to say that great caution should be used when using the allegorical method to prove any doctrine. The kind of symbolism we see here should only be used to illustrate truth, never to establish it.

Acts 13:39 is put forth by some as proof that the Body of Christ did not begin until this chapter. What they point out is that this is the first time that it is recorded in Scripture that Paul preached "justification by faith," and so is irrefutable proof that the Dispensation of Grace and, consequently, the Body of Christ did not begin until here in Acts 13. However, this is inconsistent with starting the Body of Christ in Antioch of Syria when Paul and Barnabas were first sent out by the Holy Spirit on this mission trip. We say this because this message by Paul was preached in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14ff) several months after he left Antioch of Syria on this trip (Acts 13:1-3). Are we to understand that the Body of Christ had a "rebirth" several months, perhaps almost a year, after its beginning in Antioch of Syria at the time Paul and Barnabas left on this journey? We think not. We can say that this is Paul's first "recorded" message on the theme but, as we have already shown, there were already Gentiles being saved by the Grace of God for several years before Acts 13. This necessarily would mean that Paul had been proclaiming "justification by faith" for a considerably long time before this, whether we have a detailed record of it or not. We should take note here that this message by Paul was given in considerable detail, taking up 26 verses (Acts 13:16-41). This is much longer than what is normally given of Paul's messages in Acts. We do not believe that it was placed here in

Scripture to mark the beginning of the Body of Christ, but to make it clear to the reader what Paul had already been preaching for many years and continued to preach for the rest of his life on earth (see I Tim. 1:11-17; II Tim. 1:7-13; 4:1-8,17-18).

One last argument for the Acts 13 position that we will look at is that Paul did not write any letters between Acts 9 and Acts 13 so the church could not have begun until Acts 13. At first this might sound like a reasonable argument, but with a little thought it becomes obvious that it has no strength of evidence to it at all. First of all, Paul did not write any letters in the time period covered in Acts 13 either, making this argument against the Body of Christ beginning earlier than Acts 13 an argument against it beginning in Acts 13 as well. If Paul had to write a letter to a church, or churches, before the Body of Christ could begin, then the earliest this could have taken place would have been in Acts 14:24-25 while he was at either Perga or Attalia toward the end of his first missionary journey rather than at its beginning. Second, those who hold to the North Galatia theory, which we have already looked at, would logically have to begin the Body of Christ in Acts 18 while Paul was in Corinth as they usually hold that Paul wrote what they believe are his first letters, I & II Thessalonians, at that time. This would have been about ten years after Barnabas and Paul's commissioning in Acts 13:1-3. This view simply does not hold up to the facts.

Considerations

If the Dispensation of Grace did not begin until Acts Thirteen, why didn't Paul refer back to his being sent out at that time when explaining his message and ministry to others? I find no place in Scripture that points us specifically back to Paul's being sent out in Acts Thirteen (Acts 13:1-3) except at the end of that journey where we are told that Paul and Barnabas had fulfilled the work that they had been recommended to (Acts 14:26). But, as we have seen, the inspired record consistently refers us back to the time of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

Just as the Lord saw fit to remind Israel of her deliverance from Egypt, which marked the beginning of the Dispensation of the Law, he has given us ample reminders of when our dispensation began. Saul of Tarsus' sinful, prideful, and rebellious heart attitude (I Tim. 1:13) pictures the entire race of Adam apart from Christ (Rom. 3:10,19-20,23; Eph. 2:2-3). What a glorious demonstration of God's grace took place the day he saved this insolent blasphemer and made him His own.

Just as their rescue from Egypt is repeatedly put forth in the Law and the Prophets to remind Israel of how God delivered them from bondage in Egypt to be His people (Num. 15:41; Deut. 1:30; 4:20; Josh. 24:17; Jud. 6:8; Jer. 31:31-32), we have a reminder in the Apostle Paul of how the Lord has reached down in grace to claim a people for Himself from among the nations (Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 15:1-4; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:1-9; I Tim. 1:15-16; Tit. 2:14).

The Acts Nine and Thirteen positions have been debated and discussed for years with many sincere and able Bible teachers on both sides, and we feel both positions fall safely within

the parameters of mid-Acts Dispensationalism. However, at the same time we personally believe that starting the Dispensation of Grace, and thus the Body of Christ, any place other than Acts nine is inconsistent with the scriptural testimony of the Apostle Paul's ministry and message and brings confusion to the table when we try to sort out such things as whether Peter and the other apostles became part of the Body of Christ or not and how the message and application of the Gospel Records (Matthew – John) and the Kingdom epistles (Hebrews - Jude) should be understood in relationship to the present Dispensation of Grace.

Other important questions that the Acts Thirteen position leaves us without a clear answer to are: was Paul saved into the Kingdom in Acts nine and then transferred into the Body of Christ in Acts thirteen?; what was Paul doing for fourteen years if the actual dispensing of Grace did not begin until Acts thirteen?; and, if the Kingdom program continued in force for over fourteen years after the stoning of Stephen (from Acts seven until Acts thirteen), why didn't the Tribulation period begin? In other words, was prophecy actually interrupted at Acts nine?; or at Acts thirteen? I believe that the answer to this last question is the answer to when the Body of Christ began.

We do not see this to be an issue that should be made a point of contention between believers as long as the fundamental doctrines of the faith are not denied and the Dispensation of Grace is clearly presented as a special revelation given to Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles. Each one must make up their own mind based on what the Scriptures actually say on the subject and the issues that are directly related to it. True Bereans will search the Scriptures to find the truth.

ALTERNATE POSITION: Acts 28

I believe that we have already proved that the Acts 28 position is untenable by showing that the Apostle Paul was not, and could not have been, saved under the prophesied Kingdom program. His conversion on the Damascus Road marks a distinct departure from the circumcision, or Kingdom gospel, preached by Peter and the other Kingdom apostles. What is missed by those who see the church starting in Acts 28 is the nature and purpose of the transition period that took place between Acts 9 and Acts 28. That period of time was not, as some have taught, an intermediate Pentecostal dispensation bridging the gap between Kingdom and Grace, but was truly transitional in nature as one program tapered off (the Kingdom) and another grew (Grace). It is true that there were things in Paul's early ministry that were not carried over into the post Acts period. However, it is also true that the distinct foundational doctrines of grace are found in Paul's pre-prison, prison, and post-prison letters. I know that there are some who have gone to great lengths to show differences between Paul's early and late letters but, from my research, it seems obvious to me that their conclusions are based on assumptions and logic rather than sound Bible interpretation.

In virtually all of the Acts 28 material I have reviewed, context is ignored and Scripturally untenable assertions are made. The Acts 28 writers seem to fail to understand the Kingdom, or prophetic, program of God. If this were not so, then they would not try co-mingle the message of the Apostle Paul's early letters with the Kingdom message. That salvation would go to the Gentiles was never a mystery since it is plainly foretold in the Old Testament (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3; 62:1-2). It is just as true that in the Kingdom program the Gentiles will be under the spiritual and civil authority of Israel (Isa. 49:22-23; 60:10-12; 61:5-6; Zech. 8:20-23). What was a mystery was that Jews and Gentiles would be saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ and be placed into one body with no distinction between them as is taught throughout Paul's epistles (Gal. 3:27-28; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 3:11). In the Kingdom program, there is a divide between the Jews and Gentiles. In fact, that divide is central to God's promises to Israel. Without it the whole prophetic program crashes down in a heap. It is exactly the same premise that has plagued Covenant Theology all of these years; the failure to recognize that the prophetic promises given to Israel are still valid and that God's chosen nation will one day reign over the Gentiles in the promised restoration of David's kingdom under his greatest Son's everlasting rule. By trying to force Paul's early letters to fit into the prophetic program, those who hold the Acts 28 position in effect deny the prophetic distinction that exists between Israel and the Gentiles. A distinction that all of God's promises to Israel rest on. It is a fact that the New Covenant and its blessings are particularly Israel's (Jer. 31:31-34ff.). However, it is also true in regards to the Kingdom program that Gentiles can partake of its blessings by coming under the shadow of Israel's table where they will eat of the crumbs that fall to the floor (Matt. 15:27).

On the other hand, it is important that we keep in mind the truth that Jesus Christ only died once for the sins of the world, thus the blood of the New Covenant is the only blood of redemption available for the salvation of anyone in any dispensation. So, contrary to Acts 28 teaching, the Body of Christ is connected spiritually to the New Covenant. To deny this is to

deny that Jesus Christ's crucifixion has any meaning for the Body of Christ, because it was there that He shed the blood of the New Covenant. So then, the idea of a so-called Pentecostal Dispensation between Acts 9 and Acts 28 that has Israel and the Gentiles on an equal footing in one body, with no recognized racial distinctions has no Scriptural backing. The very premise of this thinking is, in fact, antithetical to the prophesied Kingdom program that was preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and Peter and the eleven. The foundational doctrines of Grace that are found throughout the letters of the Apostle Paul simply cannot be reconciled with the basic principles of the Kingdom message.

Because of this wrong premise and faulty principles of Bible interpretation, many who have been wooed by the writings of the various authors who espouse the Acts 28 position accept many false doctrines. Some of the important Bible truths that are affected are the Rapture of the Church, the calling of men to the ministry, the intermediate state of the dead, prayer, the meaning of the Blood of Christ, how God works in the lives of believers today, the final state of the unsaved dead, and the work of the Holy Spirit. In summary, they deny the Blessed Hope of a pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church; they deny that God calls men and enables them for the work of ministry; they deny the continued conscious existence of the soul between physical death and resurrection; they do not believe that God hears and answers prayer today; they claim a bloodless redemption saying that salvation is essentially spiritual so the physical aspect of Jesus Christ's death on the Cross is not essential for the salvation of man; they deny that God intervenes in the lives of believers today in any tangible way; they believe that the unsaved dead will not face everlasting punishment in the Lake of Fire but will be annihilated; and they deny that the indwelling Holy Spirit of God is actively involved in the believers' life. It should be noted that not everyone who holds the Acts 28 position necessarily embraces all of the erroneous doctrines listed above. However, all Acts 28 people do believe a good part of them. It should also be noted that some mid-Acts believers have latched onto some of the tenets of the Acts 28 teachings such as prayer, ministry gifts, and the intermediate state of the dead. They seem to be taken by the "logic" of the Acts 28 arguments at the expense of the sound principles of Bible interpretation and Scriptural authority. So, regardless of what position a proponent of any of these grace-limiting doctrines may claim to hold to, they are still wrong and detrimental to the spiritual vitality of individual believers and the Body of Christ in general.

Endnotes

- ¹ The apostles and brethren in Judea at first contended with Peter for going to the Gentiles. But, after hearing him, they recognized that God had *“granted repentance unto life”* to the Gentiles (Acts 11:1-4,18). It should be noted that the mention of “repentance” here does not prove that they were saved into the Kingdom program. It is simply a statement to the fact that they had turned from their false gods to the True God and had been gloriously saved, just as the believers at Thessalonica are said to have done when they believed the Grace Gospel (I Thess. 1:9). This is the same as what Paul called upon the Athenians to do when he preached on the Areopagus saying *“God...commandeth all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:22,30-31).
- ² Galatia was originally an ethnic region in north central Asia Minor. In 25 B.C., this area was made a Roman province by Caesar Augustus. This province also included a number of districts to the south and west, which included Pisidia, Isauria, Phrygia, and Lycaonia. These combined annexed areas comprise what is usually referred to as South Galatia and the original ethnic area is referred to as North Galatia. Acts 16:6 and 18:3 are thought by some to refer to the more remote North Galatia, but the Scriptural evidence points to these passages as being references to South Galatia, where Paul had previously ministered the gospel and established churches.